

Setting Policy

Much of a trustee's work deals with policy—making policies, reviewing policies, interpreting policies, enforcing policies and monitoring their effectiveness.

Policies set the direction for the library and protect it from misunderstandings. They are broad, philosophical guidelines, rather than specific procedures, addressing such areas as personnel, collection management, operations, program development and intellectual freedom.

Library policies should be based on community needs, the library mission statement and established goals; they should not be a reaction to specific problems that arise.

A good set of written Board policies:

- ✓ Balances library resources and customer needs.
- ✓ Promotes consistency.
- ✓ Eliminates the need for instant (crisis) policy making.
- ✓ Clarifies Board member, director and staff roles.

Trustees are responsible for making and adopting library policies, but policy development is best done in conjunction with the director and staff. Policies should be clearly written, organized in a policy manual and made available to the staff and the public. The manual can be kept at the circulation or reference desk.

In addition, every trustee should have a copy of the policy manual and be completely familiar with the rationale for each statement. You need to thoroughly understand the policies to knowledgeably adopt new or revise existing ones. Also, you may be called upon to defend or interpret policies to the public or governing officials.

Your Board should follow established policies but keep in mind that things change. The community's economic conditions or the growth or decline of the population, for example, may justify changes in library policies. Therefore,

it is important for your Board to conduct periodic community analysis studies and be flexible enough to revise or change policies as needed. An annual review will help ensure that the policies are accurate and up-to-date.

The State Library can answer questions your Board might have on developing policies and provide you with samples of specific policies developed by other libraries.

Making Policy

Good policy is “developed” rather than just “written.” Development includes these steps:

1. Identify the need.
2. Define the issue.
3. Ask yourself if the Board is the right body to deal with the issue.
4. Identify alternative ways of dealing with the issue.
5. Examine the consequences of each alternative.
6. Determine the value of each alternative.
7. Consider what the policy says about the library.
8. Select the alternative that best expresses the Board’s and the community’s values.

After a policy is proposed, determine if it is:

- necessary?
- consistent with the library’s mission statement?
- within the scope of the Board’s authority?
- consistent with local, state and federal law?
- compatible with other policies?
- practical?
- broad enough to cover the subject completely?
- enforceable?
- affordable?

When you are ready to write the policy:

1. Establish a committee of trustees and the director to prepare a draft.
2. Seek comments on the draft; those contributing to making policy are more likely to accept and implement it.
3. Compile comments and present a recommendation to the Board.
4. Reach final consensus on the final draft; make sure wording and intent are clear.
5. Adopt the policy at a scheduled open meeting of the Board.
6. Publish and distribute the policy.
7. Train staff on new policy if needed.
8. Review effects of the policy in six months or a year.

*Library policies cover all aspects of the operation:
the what, when, where and how,
frequently the who,
and sometimes the why.*

A Policy List for Public Libraries

The following list of policies may be relevant to your needs. It is arranged in the form of an outline to show how policies relate to one another.

- I. Mission and Role Statement
- II. Board Bylaws
- III. Public Service Policies
 - A. Eligibility for borrowing and services
 - 1. Resident and nonresident
 - 2. Programming and outreach
 - B. Collection Management Policy
 - 1. Mission and goals with community description
 - 2. Responsibility for selection
 - 3. Selection criteria for each format
 - 4. Scope and priorities of collection
 - 5. Selection procedures and vendor relations
 - 6. Evaluation, weeding and maintenance
 - 7. Censorship, access and challenged materials procedure
 - 8. Intellectual Freedom Statement, Library Bill of Rights
 - 9. Gifts and donations
 - C. Circulation Policy
 - 1. Loan period and renewal
 - 2. Confidentiality
 - 3. Reserved material
 - 4. Fines, damages
 - 5. Interlibrary loan
 - 6. Special collections
 - 7. Audiovisual equipment
 - 8. Fees
 - D. Reference Policy
 - E. Facilities Policy
 - 1. Hours of operation
 - 2. Americans with Disabilities Act compliance
 - 3. Security
 - 4. Meeting room use
 - 5. Exhibits and displays
 - 6. Copiers and other equipment use

F. Community Relations Policy

1. Cooperative borrowing agreements
2. Relations with schools
3. Volunteers
4. Friends groups

G. Patron Behavior Policy

1. Unattended children
2. Respect for staff, users and library property

H. Internet Use Policy

IV. Management Policies

A. General

1. Responsibility and authority
2. Budget, accounting and financial management
3. Procurement, including gifts

B. Personnel

1. Responsibility and authority
2. Job descriptions and classifications
3. Salaries and benefits
4. Hours, annual and sick leave, overtime, holidays
5. Hiring, termination, resignations and nepotism
6. Performance evaluation and promotion
7. Continuing education/professional development
8. Discipline and grievances
9. Americans with Disabilities Act compliance
10. Fair Labor Standards Act compliance
11. Sexual harassment
12. Personnel records

C. Facilities

1. Responsibility and procedures for maintenance
2. Acquisition and ownership
3. Insurance and liability
4. Emergency preparedness
5. Americans with Disabilities Act compliance
6. Use of equipment, vehicles, etc.

Planning for the Future

Long-range planning is a fundamental duty of the Board. It takes some hard work, but once completed, a written long-range plan serves as a road map to guide the Board and the library director as they make decisions about the budget, services, personnel and other considerations.

There are several long-range planning methods. Many have the same components but differ in process. The information presented in this chapter is based on a streamlined long-range planning process developed by Sandra Nelson for the Public Library Association. You can learn more about this process in Nelson's book, *The New Planning for Results* (American Library Association, 2001). If your library does not have a copy, it is available from the State Library.

The most important aspect of Nelson's approach is its focus on community. The library exists to serve the community. But it cannot do that effectively without the community's goodwill and support.

Although your library might be doing a good job in meeting some of the needs of your community, it is likely that other needs are going unmet. The best way to identify how the library can better serve the community is to include community members in the planning process. There are two ways to do this:

- ✓ **Take advantage of other long-range planning processes.** If your city or county has already gone through a long-range planning process, look at that document to see how the library can play a roll in helping the community achieve its future goals.
- ✓ **Ask community members to be a part of a community committee involved in the planning process for the library.** Consider people who represent diverse populations, such as teens, seniors, business people, blue collar workers, government officials and others.

A Board member and library staff member should also serve on the community committee as representatives of the library. If possible, however, the library director should serve only as an ex-officio member. If the library director serves as a full member, committee members will likely look to her or him for guidance defeating the purpose of the community committee.

The Long-range Planning Process

The work of the community committee is to identify what the community needs and how the library can help meet those needs. The committee's role is not to set the library's goals and objectives. That is the Board's job. Involving the community in the planning process, however, will ensure that those goals and objectives are firmly rooted in the community's best interests.

1. Where do we want to go as a community?

The first step for the community committee is to look at the big picture. What constitutes the ideal community? What makes it successful? What does Main Street look like in a great community? How would teens define a great community? What do seniors need from the community? What do working parents need? What other groups make up the community and what do they need? At this point, all of the discussion is about the community and nothing about the library.

2. Where are we now?

Once the committee has a vision of where it thinks the community should go, it needs to step back and consider the reality of where it currently is. The easiest way to do that is to look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that presently exist in the community. What are the community's strengths and how can they be drawn on to achieve success? Conversely, what are the weaknesses that might be barriers to that achievement? Are there opportunities around the corner? What are the present and future threats to success? Again, this is still all about the community, not the library.

3. What are the community's needs and how can the library help meet those needs?

The work done in steps one and two will reveal the work that must be done for the community to achieve its vision of the future. The committee can develop a road map detailing the steps to success. Included in that road map will be the role of the library. Although the library is represented on the committee, it will probably be helpful for the committee to meet with additional library staff and perhaps Board members to discuss how the library can best support the committee's vision.

4. The library's written long-range plan

After the community committee's road map is complete, the Board can prepare the library's long-range plan setting goals and objectives for serving the community. The following elements should be included in the written plan:

- ◆ A short summary of the plan highlighting what the library wants to accomplish in the next three to five years.
- ◆ The mission of the library.
- ◆ Goals and objectives.
- ◆ Implementation activities and the staff members responsible (optional).

5. Measuring success

It is important that the Board monitors the implementation of the plan and its on-going effectiveness. Given today's ever-changing communities, the goals and objectives in the plan might need to be adapted. Trustees should set a schedule for reviewing the plan that includes periodic progress reports from the library director and any committees that are implementing parts of the plan, as well as an annual review and final evaluation. (See page 15-6 for more on the evaluation process.)

Additional Planning

After the long-range plan is in place, it becomes the basis for how the library operates. As the Board considers other elements of library services, it can use the long-range plan as the starting point for planning for facilities, technology and public relations.

Planning for Facilities

The typical public library serves the community with a variety of programs and a diverse collection of materials. The Board needs to determine if the facility meets the current needs of the library as well as its future needs based on the long-term plan. Will there be a need in the near future for more meeting rooms, for example? Do services focus on a particular user population, such as children or seniors? Will that change over time? Each group has its own needs and the facility should reflect that.

After the long-range plan is developed, the Board might decide that the library facility needs to be renovated or upgraded. If so, it is vital that the public be informed. Clearly communicate how the library's plan to meet future needs of the community is changing the face of the library. More information about planning for facilities is available from the State Library.

Planning for Technology

In addition to short-term issues, such as periodic upgrades of computer equipment, the Board must also consider long-term technology issues in light of the long-range plan. For example, if computer classes were identified as a community need, the Board may want to plan for the purchase of computers as well as find space for a computer lab within the facility. Or if digitization of local history was identified as a community need, the library might require a different set of technology and equipment than it currently owns. The long-range plan will be the guide for developing a technology plan that reflects the community's priorities.

Goals or Objectives?

Goals are general accomplishments that support the library mission. In general, goals are not time limited and are often not expected to be fully accomplished. A sample goal is: *The library provides materials which are appropriate to the lifelong learning of its adult users.*

Objectives are specific, measurable, time-limited descriptions of desired results. Achievement of objectives will be the basis for assessment of success in meeting library goals. One of many possible objectives that would relate to the above goal is: *During the next fiscal year, increase turnover rate of selected sections of the adult nonfiction collection to 10 circulations per item.*

Planning for Public Relations

On-going communication with the public is key to implementing the library's long-range plan. Written plans for each public relations campaign will help the library achieve its goals. The plans should include a clear description of the target audience, that is, who the library wants to reach; a timeline; short- and long-term goals of the campaign; staffing requirements; the budget; and details of how success will be measured. (See Chapter 16-3, Marketing the Library for more on public relations.)

Planning for Disaster

Disaster response and prevention is essential for the continuation of library business. A written disaster plan will help ensure the health and safety of the staff, decrease the amount of time it takes to begin recovery, and increase the recovery rate for materials.

When preparing a disaster plan:

- ◆ Consider types of disasters most likely to happen, including the possibility that the entire building or collection might be destroyed.
- ◆ Consider what services would be most affected if patrons and staff did not have access to the building and its collections.
- ◆ Determine who has the decision-making authority in the case of a disaster to close the library, contact the insurance company, assign staff to the recovery effort, hire temporary staff if needed and serve as media spokesperson.

It is the director's responsibility to ensure that the staff is knowledgeable about emergency procedures, but trustees should be familiar with them as well. One of the Board members might be responsible for having a copy of the disaster plan stored at home in case the library copy is damaged or is inaccessible.

Library Evaluation Primer

Evaluation addresses two questions: (1) What progress are we making, or what difference has the library made for the people it serves? and 2) What changes occurred?

Identifying Desired Outcomes

Part of the Board's responsibility in completing the long-range plan is defining its goals or desired outcomes. Outcomes result from a discussion of the critical question, "What changes or accomplishments are expected?" These can occur in the library users, the library, local agencies and organizations, and ultimately, the community.

For library users, changes might be expected in their knowledge, behaviors or attitudes. Examples of these changes include learning more about a specific subject, being a more informed consumer, reading more for relaxation or becoming more open to divergent viewpoints. Program attendance figures, the number of information requests and collection use statistics also can be used to indicate outcomes. Community collaboration is another area where desired outcomes can be defined.

Setting Targets

Once the Board has defined its desired outcomes, it can set measurable or observable objectives, or targets, including timeframes for completion. For example, targets may be to increase circulation by 10 percent within a year reduce complaints by 50 percent by the end of the fiscal year or hold three adult programs. These targets provide useful benchmarks for both the extent and quality of library services. Without clear

targets, the evaluation process can only describe what was done, not what was accomplished.

"Impact stories" can be done to supplement measurement of outcomes. These are stories that illustrate how things have changed for the users, library, collaborators or community. The process of describing impact uses quotations and observations to tell the library's story, providing a better understanding of how others are influenced by the library. They also bring multiple "voices" to the evaluation process.

Evaluation Process

Once the first two steps are completed, the evaluation process is primarily a mechanical one. The Board will need to determine who will be responsible for the evaluation and the timeline. Among those involved may be library staff, volunteers, users, community partners and funders.

The Board will also need to determine how information is collected for the evaluation. Possible methods include collecting statistics, interviews, questionnaires and structured observation. The key to choosing strategies is to consider which are the most appropriate for the information needed to document change, while keeping in mind the time and cost of each approach.

Evaluation helps promote both the effectiveness and efficiency of the library's operations and services. The goal of the process is to use the information to improve the library, making it a learning process for all involved.

Based on materials developed by Debra Wilcox Johnson, Johnson & Johnson Consulting, Waunakee, Wisconsin, for the Montana State Library, 2005.